DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 458 UD 021 522

AUTHOR Prewitt, Joseph O. Diaz: Prewitt, Maria D. Rodriquez
TITLE The Cultural Adjustment of the Puerto Rican Migrant Student.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation: *Adjustment (to Environment): Cross Cultural Studies: Elementary Secondary Education: Hispanic Americans: *Migrant Children: *Puerto Ricans: *Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the effects of migration on the cultural adjustment of Puerto Rican students. It is asserted that the school systems on the mainland and the island are not equipped to deal with the adjustment problem of Puerto Rican students. A review of the literature on the adjustment problem indicates that controlled cross-ethnic studies with Puerto Ricans are scarce and that there is a need for longitudinal studies with migrant/remigrant students on both the island and the mainland. The paper identifies three factors which must be considered by teachers and school staff in connection with Puerto Rican students: (1) the cultural experience, including the norms and values of the mainland: (2) parents' expectations, insofar as they influence the student: and (3) the economic situation of the migrant family. Behavior patterns common to students during their first year on the mainland are described and suggestions regarding teachers' response are offered. (Author/APM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED204458

The Cultural Adjustment of the Puerto Rican Migrant Student

Joseph O. Prewitt Diaz Maria D. Rodriguez Prewitt

The Pennsylvania State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Joseph O. Prewitt Diaz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UD021522

Running head: Cultural Adjustment

Dr. Prewitt Diaz, an Educational Psychologist, is currently Assistant Professor of Education and the Coordinator of the Bilingual Teacher Training Program at The Pennsylvania State University. He has worked with and conducted needs assessment and evaluations for Bilingual Education Programs.

Ms. Rodriguez-Prewitt, is currently a student in the Psychology Department at The Pennsylvania State University. She is currently researching the adjustment problems of Puerto Rican adolescents on the mainland.

Abstract

The purpose of this analysis was to discuss the effects of migration on the cultural adjustment of the Puerto Rican students. The literature was reviewed and several factors which affect the cultural adjustment of this population are suggested for consideration. The analysis found that adequately controlled cross-ethnic studies with this population is scarce. It concluded with recommendations for staff and teachers.

The Cultural Adjustment of the Puerto Rican Migrant Student

The schools in the United States have become the vehicle for the assimilation of millions of immigrants. In 1967, the Congress passed a law which provided bilingual education. Most recently, this educational methodology has been attacked as a devisive strategy, because it is assumed that bilingual education is not fostering the idea of the American educational system.

There are approximately 3.6 million limited English proficiency (LEP) children in the United States (Federal Register, August 5, 1980). Many of these children are Puerto Rican migrant/remigrants. The Puerto Ricans are American citizens and travel back and forth from the island to the mainland and vice versa at will. The children of this migrant population are in a constant process of linguistic, psychological, and physical adjustment.

The school system both on the mainland and the island are ill equipped to deal with the adjustment problem of the migrant/remigrant Puerto Rican student. The purpose of this analysis is to discuss the effects of migration of the Puerto Rican students, and to identify strategies which school personnel might implement to help this population.

The review of the literature indicated that adequately controlled cross-ethnic studies with Puerto Rican students is scarce. In Puerto Rico, Fernandez-Cintron and Valez (1975) studied the dynamics of the return migration to Puerto Rico. Gutierrez (1980) interviewed sixth to twelfth grade remigrant students with regard to the respondents' perception of the school environment in Puerto Rico. Santa Pinter (1981) administered a questionnaire to college students who had remigrated to Puerto Rico.

On the mainland only one study (Prewitt-Diaz and Gebert, 1980) was found. These researchers administered a Likert scale with 24 items which measured cultural adjustment of newly arrived Puerto Rican migrant students. This study concluded that the students suffered from cultural adjustment problems.

There is a need to conduct longitudinal studies with migrant/remigrant students both on the island and the mainland. Brown and Secrest (1980), suggest cross-cultural methodology as unique means for gathering information. However, they warn that cross-cultural research is perhaps one of the most problematic areas in which to produce statistically significant findings.

Brown and Sechrest (1980) indicate that the difficulties lie in the fact that the global aspects of culture may obscure more important underlying dimensions; differences in cultural personalities and situations make replications difficult to achieve; and, differential cultural responses may be hard to interpret. Considering the difficulties mentioned above, the researchers should become sensitive to the issues of validity (Campbell and Stanley, 1963) when designing a study with Puerto Rican migrant/remigrant populations.

Migration/Remigration and Cultural Adjustment

The constant migration/remigration process has created a generation of students with the same cultural roots but with different cultural patterns (Nogueras and Prewitt-Diaz, 1981). These students find themselves living and communicating in two different institutions, the home and the school, which are superimposed on two different cultural mainstreams of living, learning and earning. The inability to integrate and internalize the dual environment, often causes the student to exhibit behaviors that have traditionally been associated with symptoms of emotional instability.

A student is considered maladjusted when his/her behavior is significantly out of synchrorization with the expectations of others (Stainback and Stainback, 1980). There are two considerations which should be kept in mind when dealing with migrant/remigrant students. First, whether a behavior is considered maladjusted depends on many factors. The expectations vary among different social and cultural groups. A particular behavior in one group may be considered adaptive, while in another group the same behavior might be considered maladaptive.

Secondly, the age of the student displaying the behavior(s) has an influence on whether or not the behavior is labeled as maladjusted. One of the discrepancies most frequently mentioned between Puerto Rican students and Anglo teachers is that when Puerto Rican students are reprimanded, they tend to lower their eyes as a symbol of respect. The teacher might find this action to be immature, since on the mainland the same behavior expresses excessive modesty and fear of adults at the age of two or three. In other words, a behavior that might be viewed as normal at one age may be designated maladaptive at a younger or an older age.

Condon, Peters, Sueiro-Ross (1979) point out that there is a disproportionate number of Puerto Rican students tnat have been catagorized as antisocial, aggressive, withdrawn, anxious, and helpless. These students have been diagnosed as maladjusted or behaviorally disordered and placed in special classes. The hidden factor which causes many of these students to temporarily exhibit such behaviors as withdrawal, poor academic achievement, aggression, and helplessness is migration/remigration. Most schools do not have adequate programs to help the student in the adjustment process and the majority of the parents lack the skills needed to help their children.

Factors to Consider During the Process of Cultural Adjustment

There are factors which must be considered in dealing with recent arrival Puerto Rican students. These factors include: (1) the cultural experience, including norms and values on the mainland (the extent to which the student has undergone socialization); (2) the parents' expectation (hopes and fears), as far as how they influence the student; and (3) the economic situation in which the parents find themselves as they are projected to the student.

Behaviors Often Exhibited During the Process of Cultural Adjustment

There are several behaviors which have often been observed in students during their first year on the mainland. These behaviors are as follows:

1. The feeling of not belonging anymore. This feeling arouses an intense longing. It is similar to the bereavement process. The symptoms manifest themselves after leaving or losing something or someone loved: parents, a partner, a region, or a house.

2. The process of bereavement occurs more than once. The student has to undergo the process of bereavement twice or even more often in some cases: when s/he decides to return to the Island. Both occasions are characterized by a feeling of loss and transformation in the roles of the members of the family.

3. The migratory process causes both mental and physical effects which are closely interrelated. The influence of stress on the hormone system can result in feelings of unrest, agitation, and tension coupled with panic and irritability. The symptoms are restlessness, loss of appetite, loss of weight, sleep disorders, digestive complaint,

headaches, palpitations and muscle cramps. Malfunction of the organs of the body can cause superfluous perspiration, diarrhea, and nausea, especially before and during emotional events, from which psychosomatic diseases can result (Eppink, 1980).

Recommendations

The teachers and staff should:

1. acquire a knowledge of the migration/remigration process, its nature, its effects on human behavior and education.
2. be able to understand the verbal and non-verbal components of communication and their respective roles in classroom interaction.
3. be familiar with the many ways in which culture is expressed by and reflected in linguistic, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral patterns.
4. be able to distinguish between an atypical behavior which is culture-related and one which is caused by a physical or psychological handicap.

Bibliography

Brown, E.D. and Secrest, L. Experiment in cross-cultural research. In Harry C. Triandis and John W. Berry (Eds.), Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Vol. 2, Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1980.

Campbell, D.T. and Stanley, J.C. Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966.

Condon, E.C., Peters, J.Y., and Sueiro-Ross, C. Special education and the Hispanic child: Cultural perspectives. Intercultural Relations and Ethnic Studies Institute, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1979.

Eppink, A. Socio-psychological problems of migrant children and cultural conflicts. International Migration, 1979, 17, 87-119.

Federal Register, August 5, 1980, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

Fernandez-Cintron, C. and Vales, P.A. Social dynamics of return migration to Puerto Rico. Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1975.

Gutierrez, J. A survey of returned migrant students' perceptions of United States mainland and Puerto Rican school environments. Departamento de Ciencias Sociales, Recinto Universitario de Mayaguez: Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, 1980.

Nogueras, J.A. and Prewitt-Diaz, J.O. The remigration of the Puerto Rican student as a factor in school adjustment. NABE News, 4(4), June, 1981 (In press).

Prewitt-Diaz, J.O. and Gebert, W. A report of the perceptions of newly arrived Puerto Rican students concerning Home-School behavior discrepancies. Revista Cayey, June 1981, 13(30). (In press).

Santa Pinter, J.J. Our migrant student? A problem? Paper presented at The Pennsylvania State University, April 14, 1981.

Stainback, S. and Stainback, W. Educating children with severe maladaptive behaviors. New York: Grune and Stratton, Inc., 1980.